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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7668
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1229
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4773
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8317
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5879
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1619
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1675
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RANGOON 000417

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#) [EAID](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: DONORS FOCUS ON ACCESS AT CYCLONE NARGIS
CONFERENCE

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Classified By: P/E Chief Leslie Hayden for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

11. (C) Summary: The regime's hope for a cash-rich pledging conference fell flat as donors held on to their checkbooks despite Than Shwe's promise to Ban Ki Moon to allow access for international humanitarian workers to the Delta. In his opening remarks to the conference, the Prime Minister specified only civilian ships would be allowed to deliver relief goods and qualified that only assistance with no strings attached or politicization involved would be accepted. Ban Ki Moon expressed optimism the GOB would allow unfettered access to the Delta, but noted he would closely and personally follow the issue. ASEAN Secretary General Surin outlined the organization's coordinating mechanism for international assistance, but ASEAN reps in Rangoon have not yet established a functioning mechanism. End summary.

12. (SBU) In a hedged opening speech, Prime Minister Thein Sein gave a broad overview of the GOB's response to Cyclone Nargis, expressed appreciation for international assistance to date, and noted the GOB wanted to get storm victims back to work farming, fishing, and making salt, occupations Burma relies on for a large part of its annual food consumption. Thein Sein specified the GOB would welcome any assistance provided there were "no strings attached or politicization involved." He specified that relief supplies sent by sea would only be accepted from civilian ships, which would be required to dock in Yangon. Thein Sein elaborated that the GOB would accept groups interested in "rehabilitation and reconstruction" in accordance with its "priority" on a township by township basis. He thanked Burma's neighbors for the medical teams sent from China, India, Bangladesh, Thailand, Laos, and Singapore, and specified the GOB would accept additional medical teams from other countries in an orderly and systematic manner."

13. (U) UNSYG Ban Ki Moon followed Thein Sein's speech by praising the Prime Minister's remarks as in line with agreements the UN had reached with the GOB in recent days. He noted that, in a new spirit of cooperation with the international community, the GOB had agreed to allow all international assistance workers access to the Delta "as long

as they were purely humanitarian" and permission to establish logistical hubs there. He acknowledged that some international UN humanitarian experts had already received permission and departed for the Delta.

¶4. (U) Ban Ki Moon acknowledged the GOB's relief effort, but stressed that much more needed to be done. He remarked that the relief phase would have to continue for at least six months, even as Burma turned to recovery. He urged the government to accept outside transport assets such as helicopters and boats, to allow unhindered access to the Delta, and to do whatever was needed to build an effective aid and logistics pipeline. Though he remarked that Than Shwe had responded with flexibility on the access issue when they met on May 23, Ban Ki Moon asserted that prompt and full implementation would be key. He specified that he would be closely, continually, and personally engaged.

¶5. (U) ASEAN Chair and Singapore Foreign Minister George Yeo followed the UNSYG with an appeal for international support for the ASEAN coordinating mechanism. He remarked that he was heartened by Ban Ki Moon's report of his conversations with Than Shwe, and emphasized the facilitating role ASEAN could play in fostering trust between the GOB and the international community. He said the GOB must allow relief workers from all countries to enter immediately. Yeo also emphasized the need for a comprehensive assessment, terming the GOB's "too optimistic." He also appealed to donors to avoid politicizing the aid given. "Let the government concentrate on giving assistance to victims full stop," he pleaded. This did not mean countries should give up their political views, he emphasized, but rather reserve them for the proper time and place. He closed his remarks by noting that, in the spirit of transparency, Burmese Foreign Minister Nyan Win had agreed to allow international press coverage of

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the conference.

¶6. (U) UN Humanitarian Assistance Coordinator John Holmes described Cyclone Nargis relief efforts as about helping vulnerable people in need, not about politics. He reiterated that efforts were still in the emergency relief phase, although recovery and reconstruction could begin in parallel. Particular attention needed to be given to restoring livelihoods. Holmes praised the GOB's decision to allow international aid workers access to the Delta, but highlighted that implementation of this must be rapid and simple to be effective. He added that needs of the 2 million victims throughout the affected areas were not uniform and a better assessment was required. He acknowledged that the WFP would need USD 70 million worth of rice to feed the affected population over the next six months and outlined other critical needs as plastic sheeting, tarps, water treatment plants and water purification equipment, medical needs, family reunification and support for orphaned children, and psychosocial support for traumatized survivors.

¶7. (U) Holmes acknowledged the United States was leading the efforts to donate relief commodities and called on the GOB to be more flexible regarding the import of vehicles and communications equipment to support relief efforts. He highlighted that the GOB had no reliable mechanism to measure their distribution system or to track donated commodities. He emphasized that 9 of the 15 most affected townships have major unmet needs and that delivery to the far end of the chain needed to be scaled up as quickly as possible. Holmes reported that there appeared to be around 600 government run and informal settlements sheltering over 600,000 people and that movements in and out of these camps were fluid. He expressed concern about premature return of the victims without adequate services in place. Forced returns of these people of any kind were unacceptable, Holmes emphasized.

¶8. (U) ASEAN Secretary General Surin Pitsuwan closed the morning session by offering a rough explanation of the

coordinating mechanism to "assure donors of good management, transparency, and monitoring of their donations." Surin explained that an ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force would be formed consisting of 22 ASEAN representatives and technical experts, but not based in Rangoon. A smaller, nine-person "core group" would be organized in Rangoon to provide on-the-ground coordination, he elaborated. The core group would be composed of 3 members of the GOB, 3 ASEAN representatives, and 3 UN representatives. This task force would coordinate all incoming international assistance, establish agreed channels to deploy relief goods to affected areas, and facilitate a logistical chain for delivering the assistance. Surin acknowledged that any delays in deploying assistance to the Delta would undermine international confidence in the mechanism. He also noted that the nine-person core group would need access to all levels of the GOB to ensure confidence in their ability to get things done.

Surin mentioned the need to establish a monitoring system and for an assessment of the "real damage, real needs, and real extent," which would require experts. He closed by noting that ASEAN came to this task with the awareness that they were not an implementing agency and so would need international assistance to carry out their task.

¶9. (SBU) The conference continued with over fifty countries delivering statements that were remarkably unanimous in their calls for the GOB to deliver on its promise of unhindered access for international relief workers and needs assessments. Very little additional money was pledged other than donations of USD 10 million from China and an additional USD 1.5 million from India. ASEAN countries pledged in-kind assistance and token sums, but most countries outlined the donations they had already pledged and stated that they were willing to pledge more on condition the GOB fulfilled its obligation to allow unfettered access to international humanitarian experts and comprehensive needs assessments.

¶10. (C) Comment: The GOB hoped this conference would net

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billions of dollars to rebuild the ravaged Delta. Donors instead chose to remind the generals that there is no free lunch. The GOB will not be given a pass on complying with international standards for humanitarian assistance. However, this does not necessarily mean that the GOB will remove its obstacles and throw open the doors. Thus the lingering uncertainty about how much more access the international community will get. Most expect that we will have to continue pushing for more access. Now, the UN and ASEAN Secretaries General have put their prestige on the line. We will likely have to call on them to intervene personally for the sake of hundreds of thousands of victims in the Delta who have yet to receive any aid more than three weeks after Cyclone Nargis hit. End comment.

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